

# Do I have *the* flu, THAT flu, or just a cold ?

The current H1N1 flu outbreak has prompted a number of callers to the Health Unit to ask how to tell the difference between the common "seasonal" flu, this current outbreak, and a bad cold. This time of year heralds the usual flu season in East Africa.

## What is the difference between a cold and the flu?

The flu and the common cold are both respiratory illnesses but they are caused by different viruses. Because these two types of illnesses have some symptoms that overlap, it can be difficult to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. In general, flu symptoms are more abrupt and more severe; for most people, this will *not* feel like a "common cold".

### COLD SYMPTOMS

Gradual onset  
Dry, scratchy throat  
Minimal fever  
Runny nose, stuffy  
Sneezing  
Watery eyes

### FLU SYMPTOMS

rapid onset (1-2 days)  
headache, body aches, sore throat  
Fever greater than 100.4 F or 38 C  
fatigue  
dry cough

## How can you tell the difference between the current H1N1 outbreak flu and seasonal flu?

Both types of flu are caused by a type A influenza virus. The symptoms will be similar for both and only specialized testing can distinguish them.

## What should I do if I think I have the flu ?

**Limit your exposure to others:** it is important to stay home from work and to keep children who might be ill with the flu home from school.

**Contact your health care provider:** if you believe you are sick with the flu, contact your doctor's office for further guidance. Because of the current H1N1 outbreak, your healthcare provider may wish to have you undergo further testing.

## Practice good hand washing habits and cough etiquette at home:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you do not have a tissue available, cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Keep a distance, when possible, of 1-2 meters from persons ill with a respiratory infection

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

**Keep well hydrated by taking plenty of fluids. Acetaminophen (paracetamol) or ibuprofen can help control fever and body aches.**

**Contact your healthcare provider for any change in your condition**